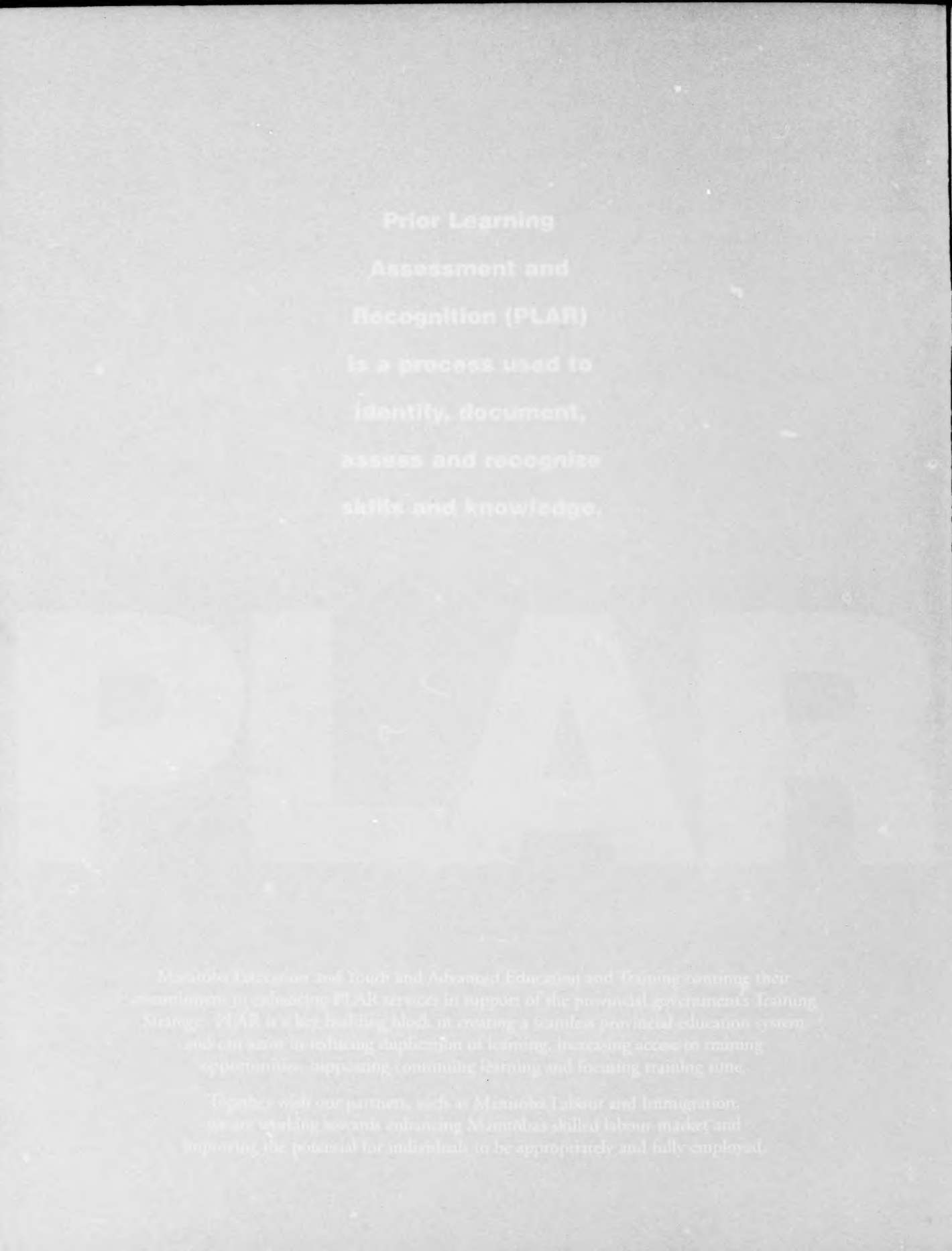
Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition in Manitoba

2002-2003
ANNUAL REPORT

Manitoba

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is a process used to identify, document, assess and recognize skills and knowledge.



Manitoba Education and Youth and Advanced Education and Training continue their commitment to enhancing PLAR services in support of the provincial government's Training Strategy. PLAR is a key building block in creating a seamless provincial education system and can assist in reducing duplication of learning, increasing access to training opportunities, supporting continuing learning and lessening training time.

Together with our partners, such as Manitoba Labour and Immigration, we are working towards enhancing Manitoba's skilled labour market and improving the potential for individuals to be appropriately and fully employed.

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Background

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is a vital tool in supporting continuous learning and in developing a skilled workforce. Put simply, PLAR helps to ensure that people receive the recognition they deserve for their knowledge and skills.

Much progress has been made in the second year of a three-year commitment to expand and integrate PLAR activity across the province. We are proud to report to the public on the successes we have achieved and the accomplishments of our partners.

Our PLAR initiative began in November 2001, when the Manitoba government released *A New Policy Framework for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR).* This framework outlined Manitoba's new PLAR strategy and assured its relevance and sustainability by linking it to other high-priority provincial initiatives dealing with effective training, college expansion, Aboriginal training and education, and immigration.

Manitoba's PLAR strategy focuses on 3 cornerstones of activity:

- Increase capacity in post-secondary institutions
- Expand PLAR advisory services throughout the community through Adult Learning Centres and Employment Centres
- Increase PLAR activities in industry through business, labour, regulatory bodies, sector councils and the Apprenticeship program.

In addition to focusing on these three pillars of PLAR, we have tracked our progress in relation to four other critical impact areas - Apprenticeship, Aboriginal education and training, recognizing foreign credentials, and recognizing prior learning in the K-S4 school system.

To implement the strategy, Manitoba Advanced Education and Training established five goals to guide our efforts over the three years of the initiative:

- Decentralize PLAR activities and supports.
- Create links among the various PLAR activities taking place in universities, colleges, adult learning centres, employment centres, and the workplace.
- Expand the network of PLAR practitioners.
- Evolve from a "project focus" to a "systemic approach" by developing the practice and application of PLAR across and among areas of learning.
- Ensure cost-effective delivery.

"The Department is moving through its three year implementation plan at an incredible speed! We are in our second year and the results are very exciting."

PLAR Coordinator, Advanced Education and Training

Progress Highlights 2002 - 2003

In the first year of the initiative, we concentrated on **raising awareness and providing training.** In 2002-2003, we turned our attention to **developing PLAR models** made up of an integrated set of flexible processes and tools which are used for recruitment, internal movement, identification of training needs, and obtaining credentials and certification throughout Manitoba. In 2003-2004, we intend to focus our attention on encouraging and **increasing the use of PLAR** throughout the stakeholder community to create a seamless, leading-edge PLAR practice - an integrated education system, a lifelong learning culture and a more skilled workforce.

We made significant progress in 2002-2003, and are confident that Manitoba is fast-becoming a leader in recognizing prior learning in the classroom, community and workplace.

The following sections provide a snapshot of the range of PLAR activities and approaches, highlighting the progress made over the past year in post-secondary institutions, community advisory services, industry, as well as in the four critical impact areas.

1 Progress in Post-secondary Institutions

Post-secondary institutions continue to be at the forefront of implementing PLAR in Manitoba. Each of Manitoba's seven universities and colleges has embarked on an independent path to implementing PLAR by developing PLAR advisory and assessment services and expanding opportunities to apply PLAR to individual courses and complete programs. Experience is showing that the resulting PLAR tools and processes provide increasing services to students in a way that enhances (rather than detracts from) the academic credibility of programs.

Every post-secondary institution in Manitoba now has designated PLAR Advisors.

The following chart is a brief overview of the status of PLAR during 2002-2003 at our post-secondary institutions.

Year 1
2001 - 2002
Laying the Foundation

Year 2
2002 - 2003
Building Capacity

Year 3
2003 - 2004
Moving Forward

Institution	Highlights
Red River College of Applied Arts, Science and Technology	• Continued development and expansion of PLAR in new courses. • Over the past four years, the number of learners receiving credit recognition through PLAR has doubled. • Participated in cross-Canada survey of feedback from learners accessing PLAR between 1998 and 2001. • Developed a PLAR Course/Program Inventory to identify the more than 300 courses developed for PLAR. • Developed and implemented a professional Portfolio Workshop in eight programs totaling 17 workshops. A resource kit and training for instructors are available. • PLAR Advisor provided PLAR pre-enrolment advising for 434 individuals. Five departments provided direct PLAR advising. PLAR Advisor assisted 172 individuals prepare for PLAR. Twenty orientation sessions were held for learners wishing to consider PLAR. • Delivered Foundation (on-site and online, total 23 completions) and Advanced Practitioner Training (on-site, total 9 completions).
University of Winnipeg	• Continued to develop PLAR as a fundamental tool supporting University of Winnipeg's adult-learner focus. • Increased raising awareness of PLAR to students, staff, faculty and external organizations. • Developed PLAR/Adult Learner database to increase tracking capabilities, and a website on PLAR to attract prospective students. • Initiated "PLAR Portfolio Building" workshops for prospective students in Developmental Studies Program.
Brandon University	• PLAR is integrated into the First Nations and Aboriginal Counseling program and opportunities are being explored to extend PLAR to Aboriginal agencies. Program-level outcomes are under development. • Program and course outcomes under development for School of Health Studies. • Continued to develop policies, procedures, forms and database to support PLAR. Increased awareness and application of PLAR principles and procedures across campus. • PLAR advisory services offer information and portfolio development sessions. A student handbook was published.

Institution	Highlights
Collège universitaire de Saint Boniface	• Formalized policies and procedures for four programs: Health Care Aide, Business Administration, Tourism and Computer Science. • Prepared information packages containing course descriptions and objectives to assist students self-evaluate for PLAR in three other programs. • Made PLAR Advisor available to students. PLAR information is available through CUSB's web page, calendar and brochures. • Continued to raise awareness and educate faculty about PLAR.
Assiniboine Community College	• Continued to develop PLAR, with PLAR now used in eight programs and 14 courses including all work experience requirements. • Developed learning outcomes for a number of programs. • Reviewed and revised PLAR tools for currency.
Keewatin Community College	• Developed individual client advisory services and assessments. • Developed mechanisms to create client profiles and to track client use of PLA services within the college. • Realigned curriculum development, instruction and assessment based on learning outcomes. • Continued to increase capacity through support services and professional development opportunities for college instructors. • Met with employers to explore an increase of PLAR for existing and potential workers. • Created a five-year PLAR strategic plan.
University of Manitoba	• Continued developing the Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) as a model for PLAR with Universities of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Victoria. The goal is to use CACE as an exemplar. Consortium has identified program outcomes, developed a self-assessment, and received applications from 15 candidates for the pilot. • Developed 35-hour "Recognition of Prior Learning in Adult Education and Training" as an elective course and developed plans to incorporate an industry-based PLAR course into the CACE program.
Winnipeg Technical College	• Initiated developmental work including internal and external communication and awareness of PLAR. • Began to develop a pilot program based on best practices for the college. • Developed a PLAR guide for the college.

2 Progress in Community Advisory Services

The Province is responsible for providing two vital services that allow Manitobans from all walks of life to access information about prior learning and its relationship to employment and education. These services are delivered through our Adult Learning Centres (ALCs) and Employment Centres.

Adult Learning Centres

In 2002-2003, the Adult Learning Centres under the direction of Adult Learning and Literacy, have dramatically increased the use of PLAR in their Advisory Services area. The centres, located across the province, are community partnerships organized to provide adult learners with opportunities to:

- Develop life, literacy and employment skills
- Enhance their academic qualifications
- Engage in life-long learning

Nature of PLAR Advisory Services at ALCs

Total Learners Advised	405
Partial or Full Credit for Mature High School Diploma	224
Employment Goals Advice	28
Direct referrals to other Institutions	29

PLAR is proving to be a valuable advising tool in providing their clients with assistance in attaining high school credits for prior learning and in developing skills and interest portfolios that assist with gaining employment. Clients are reporting that a major value of PLAR is that it saves them time on their path to employment or education goals. *In particular, the availability of PLAR and the advantage it offers in time savings encourages adults to access further education and training and may be a deciding factor in their return.* For many adults it helps them to realize their dream of attaining a high school diploma.

PLAR is also providing counsellors and instructors with a different way of providing guidance and instruction. They report that they are able to provide clients with more realistic planning and goals often utilizing a learning plan as a tool.

In addition, by using the concept of clear benchmarks or standards against which to assess prior learning, it has prompted instructors to re-examine and improve the assessment criteria used for courses.

Instructors also want the benefits of a PLAR process for their own further education and training. ALC staff are using PLAR to receive credit for prior learning towards a Certificate in Adult Education.

Training for Teachers, Counselors and Administrators at ALCs/Community Agencies

2001-2002	340 attended PLAR workshops/awareness-raising sessions 48 (out of 340) completed Level 1 certification, PLAR Foundation Training
2002-2003	205 attended PLAR workshops/awareness-raising sessions 92 (out of 205) completed Level 1 certification
TOTALS	545 attended workshops/awareness raising 140 individuals certified to Level 1 40 out of 43 ALC programs have trained staff 35 centres now providing PLAR services

Employment Centres

The province operates 16 Employment Centres throughout Manitoba that provide services to individuals seeking employment. PLAR is significant to the Employment Centres as a means of advising job-seekers on ways to refine and upgrade job qualifications.

PLAR services in these centres continue to be enhanced. All Employment Centres are offering some level of PLAR services:

- Assessing appropriateness for the PLAR process
- Initial determination of prior learning and referral of candidates to educational institutions for credit recognition
- Resume and portfolio development for employment purposes
- Support individuals to access training specific to filling learning/skills gaps
- Information sessions, such as those held at Employment Connections in Winnipeg every Friday.

Employment and Training Services has undertaken a strategic project to develop an enhanced and sustainable model of delivering PLAR advisory services.

3 Progress in Industry

Throughout 2002-2003, industry increased its experience with and knowledge of the relevance of PLAR in the workplace.

Expertise continues to be developed in defining and assessing competencies, assessment models and processes, and in the diverse Human Resource and quality-related uses for specific PLAR tools and comprehensive PLAR models.

The Workplace Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Committee (WPLAR) - a business, labour and government partnership that is coordinated by Industry

Training Partnerships - provided overall coordination for the implementation of PLAR in Manitoba workplaces

WPLAR supported a range of education and research activities during the year, including:

- Facilitating a discussion session on barriers to certifying foreign-qualified engineers
- Developing a competency profile for welders
- Researching how employers recognize foreign qualifications
- Organizing a range of promotion and awareness events
- Offering professional development activities for workplace PLAR practitioners
- Providing mentoring for workplace practitioners
- Developing industry-based practitioner training
- Consulting with labour groups about PLAR

Industry projects for 2002/2003 included:

- ***Manitoba Hydro*** – PLAR process developed to assess and document the equivalency of on-the-job learning to a post-secondary education qualification for Human Resource Advisors.
- ***New Flyer Industries*** –Developed a Skills Passport for Production Workers to document required competencies and a worker's knowledge and abilities.
- ***Certified Technicians and Technologists Association of Manitoba (CTTAM)*** – Developed and piloted a workplace assessment process to recognize prior learning for certified technicians and technologies at a number of sites.
- ***Northern Family Justice Workers*** – Developed an online, self-assessment tool.
- ***Employment Projects of Winnipeg*** – Researched the use of PLAR by employers in the recruitment process.
- ***North West Company*** – Continued to develop a competency-based PLAR model for retail and meat cutting positions, including developing learning outcomes that can be articulated between the workplace, school and community education centres.
- ***College of Midwives of Manitoba*** – Developed and piloted competencies and PLAR processes as part of a longer-term commitment to recognizing the experience of midwives applying for regulation.

4 Progress in Critical Impact Areas

Although Manitoba's PLAR initiative focuses its programming on our post-secondary institutions, the broader community of learners and job seekers (through Adult Learning Centres and Employment Centres), and industry, its impact is also clearly evident in four significant impact areas:

- Manitoba's Apprenticeship program
- Aboriginal education and training
- The recognition of foreign credentials
- Manitoba's K-S4 school system

Apprenticeship

In 2002-2003, the Manitoba Apprenticeship program continued its work in developing PLAR policies and procedures. Some highlights include:

- Established a PLAR Coordinator position, specifically involved in Trades Qualifications (challenge of the Red Seal exam).
- Began developing a PLAR process for mature student admission.
- Commenced work on a PLAR project for the Carpentry trade including developing a PLAR assessment tool.
- Began establishing PLAR policies and procedures through an internal working group.
- Introduced the concept of PLAR to the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualification Board and to all staff.

Aboriginal Education

The Aboriginal Education Directorate continues to conduct research into PLAR and to advocate for its adoption and use. Their recent collaboration with Southeast Family Services in the Social Work Diploma Program will create an opportunity for a PLAR pilot project. The resulting model, in which PLAR is expected to be an integral part, will help Aboriginal adults to more easily re-enter the formal education system by crediting the skills and knowledge they have gained in the workplace. Given that the project is being carried out through a collaborative process that directly involves Aboriginal leaders and learners, we anticipate that the future implementation of this action-based research will directly respond to the needs of Aboriginal adult learners.

The Aboriginal Education Directorate also continues to participate in discussions and information-sharing with partners such as the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation to advance PLAR in the overall research and development activities into Aboriginal education in Manitoba.

Recognizing Foreign Qualifications

Recognizing the credentials of people who have received their education and training outside of Canada remains an ongoing challenge and often results in significant unemployment and underemployment of highly skilled immigrants who settle in Manitoba.

In 2002-2003, a significant step forward was achieved with the establishing of a Ministerial Committee on Qualifications Recognition, representing eight different provincial government departments. The committee launched an extensive consultation process that involved more than 23 interested organizations. The process began with a one-day think tank for 175 participants who represented self-regulatory bodies, trade groups, educational institutions, all levels of government, businesses, immigrant organizations, ethno-cultural organizations, social justice organizations, sector councils, academics, unions, chambers of commerce, and business councils.

After six months of research, consultation and reflection, the process culminated with the publication of the *Framework for a Manitoba Strategy on Qualifications Recognition*. The framework has been approved, and a final Manitoba Strategy is expected in the fall of 2003.

Manitoba Labour and Immigration will continue to pursue PLAR as a way to alleviate the systemic barriers that result from the processes that we currently follow.

Challenge for Credit Option

Manitoba's K to S4 school system participated in the PLAR initiative, in part through the "Challenge for Credit Option" process. In 2002-2003, three intensive consultations with different groups of Manitoba school principals were conducted to obtain their input on the guidelines for implementing the Challenge for Credit Option with parents, students and schools.

In addition, we used the Inter-organizational Curriculum Advisory Committee as a vehicle to consult key educational partner groups - including the Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST), the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS) and the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) - on the implementation guidelines outlined in the document *Increasing Choice and Flexibility: Changes to Senior Years Education Requirements: A Status Report* (June 2002).

In 2002-2003, schools referred to these implementation guidelines to develop their plans for making the Challenge for Credit Option available in the 2003-2004 school year.

Educational Assistants Development Framework

Work continued on the Educational Assistants Development Framework - a competency framework for Educational Assistants working in the Manitoba school system. This project was initiated after the Special Education Review Initiative (SERI) identified the need for appropriate training of all staff who work with students in Manitoba's school system, particularly those with special needs, as a priority need. The project used PLAR processes and principles to identify the competencies required to carry out responsibilities of the Educational Assistants. The resulting framework is a holistic developmental model based on extensive consultations in the field.

The next step in the process will be to develop an assessment process and tool for recognizing and documenting competencies. It is expected that the articulation and enhancement of these competencies will lead to improved service to students and better outcomes for children in the classroom.

Reaching Our Goals

GOAL 1:

Decentralize PLAR activities and supports.

We continue to expand our capacity to develop and deliver PLAR in educational institutions, industry associations, businesses, employment centres, and Adult Learning Centres. We are excited about the progress we have made to date and recognize that we are on the threshold of significant system-wide change.

Building awareness about PLAR and its availability is a key activity in decentralizing. Communication strategies continue through internal efforts such as a government coordination group, professional networking activities and the Manitoba Prior Learning Assessment Network (MPLAN), an association of PLAR practitioners. WPLAR has hosted several awareness-raising events, including an education session on the application of PLAR to Aboriginal Learning, and another on the Australian experience of integrating PLAR into its entire training system. An open discussion has also been facilitated with organized labour groups. Work continues on increasing awareness and sharing Manitoba 'lessons learned'.

In addition to each area's brochures and web presence, Manitoba has a series of brochures, publications and two websites which provide a consistent and comprehensive source of information to individuals and organizations.

GOAL 2:

Create links among the various PLAR activities taking place in universities, colleges, adult learning centres, employment centres, and the workplace.

Within government, a coordinating group meets that represents Employment and Training Services, post-secondary education, Adult Learning and Literacy, Industry Training Partnerships, Apprenticeship, the Aboriginal Education Directorate, and Labour and Immigration. The group's intent is to pursue an implementation of PLAR towards a seamless and integrated learning system.

Uppermost in the group's mind is the need to always view individual efforts as it links to related areas and to create the necessary connections for a seamless education system.

The fundamental question we ask is, "How do we best facilitate the movement of our learners towards their life goals?"

Awareness/education events and further development of PLAR websites enhance the coordination and communication, encourage the formation of relationships and help develop Manitoba's PLAR expertise and experience.

GOAL 3:

Expand the network of PLAR practitioners.

Practitioner development continues in the post-secondary, community and industry areas. The PLAR implementation team's goal is to ensure that Manitoba has well-trained PLAR practitioners throughout the system.

Today, PLAR Foundation Training is available through Red River College (onsite and online) and through Adult Learning and Literacy at the Adult Learning Centres and Employment Centres. Moreover, PLAR Practitioner Training (Advanced) is available at Red River College and will be available online in 2003-2004.

PLAR for Industry will be available in January 2004 through the Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) at the University of Manitoba. Recognition of Prior Learning in Adult Education and Training is delivered through CACE.

Professional Development workshops are offered throughout the year by a number of organizations, including the Manitoba Prior Learning Assessment Network, Employment Projects of Winnipeg, and the Workplace Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Committee (WPLAR). (Further information is available at www.plarinmanitoba.ca.)

GOAL 4:

Evolve from a "project focus" to a "systemic approach" by developing the practice and application of PLAR across and among areas of learning.

In 2002-2003, we laid the groundwork for a systemic approach to PLAR. While PLAR is still evident in specific projects, systemic models are being developed and successfully implemented. A determination to share lessons learned and continually improve are resulting in a Manitoba-wide practice of recognizing prior learning.

GOAL 5:

Ensure cost-effective delivery.

Each area of responsibility examines the feasibility and sustainability with the goal of creating cost-effective systemic solutions. Within current funding levels, we have achieved annual objectives but are also beginning to understand and document the considerable value-added outcomes to individuals and to organizations.

Conclusion

This second year of the PLAR initiative, 2002-2003, has seen a marked increase in the availability of PLAR services to Manitobans. More tools and processes have been developed and refined that will position this province as a leader in recognizing prior learning from and between the classroom, the community and the workplace.

Increasing numbers of people are aware of PLAR, and are accessing services and delivery systems as they pursue their goals. PLAR practitioners and partners share an increasing commitment to learning more about the potential of PLAR and adapting it to meaningfully help individuals understand and attain recognition for what they know and what they can do.

While the 2002-2003 fiscal year has seen significant progress, more work lies ahead. The Manitoba government looks forward to reporting the progress made in 2003-2004, and to telling you about how Manitobans worked together to create an integrated, leading-edge PLAR practice in Manitoba.

Post-Secondary Institutions

Red River College of Applied Arts, Science and Technology
(204) 632-2065/ 632-3094

Keewatin Community College
(204) 677-6674

Brandon University
Institution Contact (204) 727-7413
Student Contact (204) 571-8533

University of Manitoba
(204) 474-6685

Assiniboine Community College
(204) 725-8700 ext. 6615

Winnipeg Technical College
(204) 989-6519

Collège universitaire de Saint Boniface
(204) 233-0120 ext. 402

University of Winnipeg
(204) 786-9767

Advisory Services

Adult Learning Centres
(204) 945-3556/1-800-282-8069 ext. 3556

Employment Centres
(204) 945-8341

Industry

Industry Prior Learning Assessment
(204) 945-1682

Settlement and Labour Market Services
(204) 945-5978

Apprenticeship
(204) 945-3337

Or visit our Web sites at:

www.edu.gov.mb.ca/aet

www.plarinmanitoba.ca

www.wplar.ca